



Wycombe Wanderers' first goal in their 1974 Rothmans Isthmian League campaign coming up via Keith Mead (2nd left). The shot gave Kingstonian goalkeeper Ian Bath no chance in the 13th minute of Saturday's match at Loakes Park. Wanderers opened their season with a 2-0 triumph.

NO THRILLS — BUT WYCOMBE OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT

By STUART EARP Wycombe Wanderers 2, Kingstonian 0

ROTHMANS Isthmian League champions Wycombe Wanderers made a cautious start to the 1974 campaign on Saturday with a comfortable 2-0 victory over Kingstonian.

The result was never seriously in doubt after Keith Mead scored the Blues' first goal of the season in the 13th minute and when Steve Perrin made it 2-0 in the second half. Wanderers produced some neat football to round off a satisfactory performance.

I suppose we have been spoilt too often at Loakes Park, especially last season, for I think many people expected a class performance from Wycombe in their opening match. They didn't get it. What they did get, however, was a thoroughly workmanlike display, three points and a chance to see which of the players were staying at Loakes Park.

In fact there were only two new faces in the side from last year — centre back Alan Phillips and midfielder Howard Kennedy. Welsh international Phillips, the Hendon centre half for several seasons, bolstered an already excellent defence, although his arrival has meant Dave Bullock switching to full back. After so many five star games last term, Bullock must feel somewhat disappointed. But with Roger Grant now playing for Hitchin, he has the chance to make the left back spot his own.

Kennedy's performance on Saturday was disappointing in comparison with his promising displays in the pre-season friendlies. It is very early days yet and this player has the ability to make a real impact this term. But on Saturday he never really settled down and all too little was seen of him.

Missing of course, was Larry Pritchard now playing for his old club Sutton. It was Pritchard's enthusiasm and ability to dominate a certain phase of the game that Wycombe missed for

a time and no doubt will in the future.

Midfield suffered slightly due to his absence but one redeeming feature was the performance of Terry Reardon. He supplied some delightful touches and was the mainspring of the majority of the Wycombe attacks — and once again his astute free kicks brought a goal.

At the back Wycombe looked about as safe as the Bank of England. Mead and Phillips dominated the penalty area while Paul Birdseye had an outstanding game at right back. As in the friendlies, Paul looked a new player, challenging furiously for 50-50 balls and also overlapping well on the flanks. Best of all, however, was his distribution. The number of his passes that went astray could be counted on one hand.

Goalkeeper John Maskell had a quiet match but like last season, looked somewhat suspect when dealing with the high cross. On a couple of occasions he failed to take the ball cleanly but he still looks the best keeper on the club's books at present.

So there it is. Certainly no great weaknesses in the side that

turned out on Saturday and without doubt, a good deal of talent. After a few more matches, this team could well be challenging again for honours but a question mark still hangs over them when they come up against some of the better sides in the league.

On Saturday they were faced by a distinctly ordinary Kingstonian team. There was no Mick Preston to halt their attacks and no Trevor Waughman or Johnny Doyle to test the defence. Overall, Kingstonian looked desperately short of attacking power.

Ian Bath and Adrian Hill both stood out in their defence but Rob Williams, a Wanderer for four seasons and now the K's skipper, struggled to get into the game at all. In attack, their best hope lies in the speed of Dave Skinner, who signed with Ron Fruen from Leatherhead in the close season. Fruen, now in the limelight of his career, was never given even a half chance by the Wycombe back four.

One aspect of Wycombe's play on Saturday that particularly caught the eye was the number of defenders who joined attacking movements. Both

Bullock and Mead came up for dead ball kicks and both looked eminently dangerous. Bullock was only just wide with a fierce left foot drive after three minutes and then ten minutes later Mead scored the Blues' opening goal of the season.

From a free kick some 35 yards out, the ball was rolled through the visitors' defence to Keith Searle, who allowed it to pass between his legs and through to Mead. The Wycombe centre back let fly with full power and arched the ball over Ian Bath and into the net.

Two minutes later, it could and should have been 2-0. Williams tried a suicidal back pass to his goalkeeper but merely succeeded in giving Tony Horseman a clear route to goal. "Bodger" was five yards clear of any defender and seemed odds on to score. Bath, however, did the only thing possible by racing out of goal and blocking the shot with his body.

In that situation one would back Horseman to score nine times out of ten. But on Saturday, he missed another similar chance and apart from a couple of characteristic flicks, had a

quiet game.

Kennedy saw a sliding shot deflected for one of Wycombe's nine first half corners and as the half progressed, the Blues' football became more and more intricate. A series of one-touch passes brought deserved applause from the crowd on one occasion but too often the moves broke down with a Kingstonian interception.

Steve Perrin, who improved after a poor start, clipped the angle of bar and post in the 40th minute. Kennedy was only just wide with an enterprising volley and Mead saw a powerful header brilliantly tipped over by Bath before the interval. The crowd of 1,400 were somewhat limited in their appreciation after 45 minutes.

Sheer determination created a chance for Horseman to make it two, soon into the second period but once again Bath's body prevented a goal while at the other end, Maskell failed to hold a spinning ball and was thankful to see Bullock hook the ball away. But apart from these two goalmouth incidents, the game was badly in danger of petering out as play became scrappy.

Perrin brought the game to

life again with the Blues' second goal after 63 minutes. Holfield drove a corner low across goal to Horseman, who applied the necessary nudge for Perrin to dive in and deflect the ball home.

A touch of sheer class from Reardon almost secured the third goal and £40 bonus from Rothmans, five minutes later. Reardon sold one defender an outrageous dummy before slotting through to Holfield. Mick had very little time or room for a shot and with hardly no backlift, powered in a drive which Bath turned around the post.

After 75 minutes, Reardon was replaced by Graham Mackenzie, who all but scored with his first touch of the ball. Bullock's throw-in bounced in field some 30 yards out from the Kingstonian goal where Mackenzie hammered in a volley which Bath only just managed to turn over the crossbar. "Jock" had a couple of other shots on target during his short stay of 15 minutes and looked extremely promising.

As Kingstonian tired badly in the last 10 minutes, Wanderers dominated the final exchanges with Mead once again going close to that elusive third goal before the final whistle.

Before the match, Wycombe's chairman Mr. Jack Smethurst received the Rothmans Isthmian League championship flag from Mr. Barry East, the league's chairman.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, A. Phillips, D. Bullock; H. Kennedy, T. Reardon (sub G. Mackenzie 75 mins), M. Holfield; A. Horseman, K. Searle, S. Perrin.

KINGSTONIAN: I. Bath; D. Adedun, A. Hill, P. Procter, R. Clarke, M. Cook, R. Williams, D. Leonard; S. Esslemont, R. Fruen, D. Skinner. Sub M. Roach (not used).

Referee: D. Smith (Hornchurch).
Half time: 1-0. **Goalscorers:** Wycombe — Mead (13), Perrin (63).
Official paying attendance: 1,120. **Approximate total attendance:** 1,400.

Wood and Price leave

PHIL WOOD, Wycombe Wanderers' utility defender, has left the club. Wood joined the Blues from Enfield a year ago and played the first half of the season at centre back with Dave Bullock. When Keith Mead was signed in mid-season, however, he was forced to switch to midfield.

He was asked to sign on by Wanderers this term but decided against it. He is expected to join a club nearer

home, possibly St. Albans City. Manager Brian Lee commented that Wood's departure would be a loss to the club and said the player suffered because of his own versatility.

Another player who has left Wycombe is Tony Price, their young winger who played in a handful of league matches last season. Price felt that playing for Wanderers would be too time consuming while at Oxford University, but will be

playing for Leicester City Reserves at weekends. He has re-signed with the First Division club.

Several of the other players who turned up in the three pre-season friendlies have not been retained. They are Mick Chatterton, John Hutchinson, Keith Griffiths, Richard Wilkes and Graham Cracknell. Wanderers have signed the 12 players which played against Kingstonian

plus full-back Paul Griffiths and striker Dylan Evans. Dave Alexander, who played against Witney Town last Saturday, is expected to join the squad later in the season.

It was confirmed this week that Larry Pritchard, the club skipper last season, has signed on for Sutton United. He played against Slough Town in United's 1-0 victory on Saturday. Roger Grant was in the Hitchin Town team that drew 1-1 at Ilford.